

‘If you use the right Arabic...’: Responses to special language standardization within the BBC Arabic Service’s linguascope

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Abstract

Within language-sensitive IB literature, a range of studies examine responses to corporate language policies, especially in relation to English. However, research addressing other languages, and profession-specific influences on responses to language standardization remains scarce. This qualitative paper discusses journalists’ responses to corporate language standardization within the linguascope of the BBC Arabic Service. The findings demonstrate the impact of various interlinked influences on these responses: from external ones associated with the macro-level of the arabophone context and the journalistic profession, to internal organizational ones, occurring at the meso-level of the BBC, and the micro-level considerations linked with individual journalists’ career-related intentions.

Key words

Differentiated language-specific perspective; journalistic professional values; language standardization; linguascopes; special languages; Standard Arabic.

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1. Introduction

Language-sensitive IB research has generated valuable knowledge about the influence of corporate language policies within linguistically diverse corporations. For example, it has been established that language strategies and choices have intended and unintended implications for organizational outcomes (Golesorkhi, Mersland, Piekkari, Pishchulov & Randøy, 2019; Neeley, 2017; Sanden, 2020; Tenzer, Terjesen & Harzing, 2017), as well as positive and negative impact on employee outcomes, identity and career opportunities (Fitzsimmons, Baggs & Brannen, 2020; Peltokorpi & Pudelko, 2020; Presbitero, 2020; Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). Scholars have also argued that to fulfil their strategic goals in language standardization processes, multinational and multilingual organizations are challenged to address language differences, exclusions and power imbalances (Fiset & Bhave, 2019; Gaibrois & Steyaert, 2017; Linn, Sanden & Piekkari, 2018; Tenzer, Pudelko & Harzing, 2014). In particular, researchers investigating responses to the introduction of corporate language strategies have shed light on the emergence of conflict and resistance (Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997). Such conflicts have been addressed as both associated with micro-level interactions and power dynamics (Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017; Wilmot, 2017), and as linked to macro-level issues, such as large scale cultural distances, institutional orders, and socio-political and ideological stances (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Boussebaa, 2020; Decock, De Wilde, Van Hoof et al, 2018).

Within this body of work, language standardization has usually been discussed with reference to the implementation of a common language across the corporation (Lønsmann, 2017; Sanden, 2020). Previous studies have primarily focused on tensions and competition between the espoused corporate language, predominantly – albeit not exclusively – English, and subsidiaries' local languages (e.g. Heikkilä & Smale, 2011; Linn et al, 2018; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018). To date, however, little is known about how professionals respond to

attempts to standardize the special language of their practice. Special languages – of which the language of journalism is an example – are occupationally driven, often associated with industry or functional department levels, and necessarily meaningful for professionals’ practical proficiency, or ‘mastery’ (Larson, 1977) at work (Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 2014; Tietze, Holden & Barner-Rasmussen, 2016). As with any introduction of corporate language policies, corporate standardization of a special language brings about a range of consequences for the organization. To address the current gap in our knowledge about professionals’ responses to special language standardization, the paper draws on a qualitative study conducted within a multinational corporation (MNC) operating in the broadcasting sector. It examines journalists’ responses to a top-down corporate initiative to standardize the journalistic special language used to produce journalistic output for audiences based in the arabophone context, which we define as consisting of the geographical and online spaces where the majority of the population uses Arabic as their first language.

Aiming to deepen our understanding of the impact of language standardization in IB settings, the paper offers a differentiated language-specific perspective on the standardization of the special language of journalism. As Pudelko, Tenzer and Harzing (2015) have argued, a differentiated language-specific understanding of language differences in IB takes into account a range of sources and locations of diversity, for example cultures, professions and organizations. For the purpose of our analysis, we adopt Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois’s (2011, p. 277) concept of linguascape which they define as

the discursive space in which an organization or any other actor frames and imagines how it can deal with its (de facto) multilingual composition by negotiating among various discursive options that distinguish between local, national or global spaces and that are oriented to more situational or enduring solutions.

The concept of linguascapes is well suited to investigating responses to language

standardization as context-dependent, as it sensitizes researchers towards the existence of differentiating elements within contexts of study (Pudelko et al, 2015). With its emphasis on multilinguality, it is also well suited to studying the arabophone context, since, as exemplified by the classification of languages by the International Organization for Standards (ISO, 2020), Arabic is defined as a macro-language, consisting of separate individual languages.

Against this background, the paper addresses the following research question: In what ways, if at all, do external, organizational- and individual-level issues influence journalists' responses to corporate attempts at standardizing the journalistic special language?

The empirical material was collected within the BBC Arabic Service during the strategically significant time of introducing a BBC 'house style', i.e. adopting a refined, organizationally-instituted version of journalistic Arabic based on 'Standard Arabic' – which is a simplified variant of classical Arabic, normally used in formal contexts. The findings build an understanding of the external aspects of the arabophone context and the ways in which these influenced journalists' responses to corporate attempts to standardize their special language of practice within the BBC Arabic's linguascape. These external aspects refer to political, cultural and socioeconomic influences, as well as to journalistic practices and values, which are established and legitimized at the supra-national level (Hafez, 2002). The empirical material also offers insights into a range of organizational (meso-level) and individual career-related (micro-level) considerations, and demonstrates connections between these and professionals' responses to language standardization. In particular, the analysis highlights the importance of the professional values of journalism; organizational features such as the BBC's corporate identity and managerial support for the development of journalistic competencies; and the journalists' career aspirations and intentions.

The paper contributes to language-sensitive IB and sociolinguistic research in three ways. First, it offers granular insights into responses to language standardization in the case of a

special language of practice, and shows how these are connected to context-specific influences that can be identified at different levels of analysis. Second, through focusing on the under-explored arabophone context, it enriches extant empirical knowledge about Arabic linguascapes and their relevance for multinational organizations operating in this context. In doing so, it responds positively to calls for moving away from addressing *linguae francae* with a focus on English or other languages used in European countries, and, instead, for exploring other languages in use (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov & Mäkelä, 2014; Sanden, 2020; Tenzer et al, 2017). As Pudelko and Tenzer (2019) highlight, (non-corporate) local language skills have been found to be crucial career competencies (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). Including Arabic within language-sensitive IB research is important due to the significance of this language at a global level (Chan, 2016), and because Arabic poses unique challenges for professionals striving for language mastery and for organizations intending to develop effective language strategies. Third, the paper adds nuance to Steyaert et al's (2011) conceptualization of linguascapes through including in the analysis interdependent context-specific phenomena occurring at different levels.

The next section outlines the relevant literature underpinning our research. This is followed by a discussion of the study context and the methods applied in data collection and analysis. The empirical analysis addresses the journalists' responses to language standardization. Subsequently, we discuss the contributions of the research, and conclude with suggestions for future research and implications for management practice.

2. Linguascapes, the Arabic language and professional values of journalism

This section discusses the relevant concepts and debates associated with contextualizing the study of linguascapes; responses to standardization, with a focus on the special language of journalism; and the importance of professional values and competencies for journalists' practice.

2.1 Contextualizing the study of linguascapes

The term ‘linguascape’ was introduced to language-sensitive IB literature following its initial development in sociolinguistics, where it is considered to denote a ‘large repository’ of ‘multiple linguistic resources’ (Dovchin, 2017, p. 147). Particularly relevant to language related discussions in IB is the understanding of linguascapes as the outcome of relationships and tensions between various languages and related identities, in light of interactions among economic, cultural or ideological systems (Coupland, 2003). In their seminal piece introducing the concept of linguascape to IB, Steyaert et al (2011) draw attention to it as an important conceptual frame enabling a complex and sophisticated analysis of the socio-political processes underlying language use in multinational and multilingual organizational contexts. Similarly, Tietze et al (2016) see linguascapes as a valuable conceptual resource towards mapping language use in organizations. They argue for the development of different takes on language, including dimensions of language associated with specific corporate locales and professional fields of activity. Steyaert et al (2011, p. 277) recommend that language sensitive researchers apply the concept of ‘linguascapes’ as a device to ‘point at the dynamics of accounting for language use and of their consequences for (im)balances among languages and the respective minorities and majorities these languages represent’. Both Steyaert et al (2011) and Tietze et al (2016) emphasize the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness between language use and broader structural and cultural aspects. To date, however, few studies – beyond Steyaert et al’s (2011) work – have examined such connections empirically. For example, Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Säntti (2005) highlight the link between language use and the underlying colonizer/colonized identities, practices and techniques, leading to fixed power relationships in the context of a multinational merger. Tenzer and Pudelko (2017), on the other hand, discuss the potential implications of degrees of formality inbuilt within linguistic structures for power dynamics in multinational teams. Whilst focusing on different phenomena, both studies

contribute to the field through addressing the link between relatively stable social and linguistic structures and language use. Notwithstanding these contributions, as Angouri and Piekari (2018) contend, there is a need for research connecting the macro- and micro-levels of analysis.

In the case of language use within the BBC Arabic Service, drawing on the concept of linguascapes can help us understand better whether and how macro-environmental and profession-specific (external), meso- (organizational) and micro-level (individual) influences, affect responses to corporate language standardization. This is because the concept of linguascapes, in emphasizing the importance of relationships and tensions between varieties of languages and related identities (Coupland, 2003; Peltokorpi & Pudelko, 2020), can help in capturing the intricacies of multilinguality characterizing arabophone journalism. Colloquial Arabic is fragmented into at least 33 Arabic dialects which, as highlighted above, are significantly distinct from one another, and are considered to be separate languages (ISO, 2020). This makes it appropriate to conceptualize Arabic as having a ‘multilingual composition’ (Steyaert et al, 2011, p. 277). The impacts of diasporas, migrations, and historically embedded linguistic variation have led to the creation of a mediating register, the (modern) Standard Arabic (SA) – or /fuṣḥá al-‘aṣr/. SA constitutes a simplified version of classical Arabic, a ‘higher’ variety register normally used in formal contexts, such as literature, education, media and public affairs. There are important function, purpose and prestige differentials associated with the use of Standard Arabic (Albirini, 2016). Whilst often considered a country-neutral lingua franca and a tool for pan-Arabic unification (Hafez, 2002; Versteegh, 2001), SA is not spoken by any arabophone community, except for the elites engaging in intellectual conversations (Gherwash, 2017). Applying the concept of linguascapes can enable us to understand better the challenges faced by journalists operating in a complex language system such as Arabic, and the impact of such challenges on professionals’ responses to corporate standardization of the special language of their professional practice.

2.2 Responses to language standardization

Language standardization has attracted research attention in both sociolinguistics and language-sensitive IB research. Sociolinguistic scholars (e.g. Chen, 2018; Maegaard, 2020) have argued that standardization is embedded in evolving local conditions – be it historical, political or sociocultural – and therefore should be studied with a focus on situated meanings and consequences. Researchers have pointed to a range of problematic issues arising from language standardization, such as threats to language diversity (Heller, 2010), the potential for disrespect for employee rights and identity (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2008), and a risk of employee resentment and resistance towards language standardization and control over communication practices at work (Bermann, 2005). Within language-sensitive IB literature, specifically, existing work on language standardization positions standardized language as a valuable resource that enables communication, knowledge sharing and co-ordination across groups (Heikkilä & Smale, 2011), in particular through the use of *linguae francae*. Standardized language has also been advocated as a means to secure market entry, control and access to untranslatable cultural knowledge (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Using English language as the corporate language, moreover, has been considered as potentially supportive of the creation of an international brand (Linn et al, 2018). However, as with other attempts to implement corporate language strategies (Linn, 2010; Marschan et al, 1997), language standardization is considered to potentially lead to conflict, emerging in micro-level interactions between decision-makers and subordinates, and reflective of larger scale cultural distances, institutional orders, and socio-political and ideological stances (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Decock et al, 2018; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017; Wilmot, 2017). Language-sensitive IB scholars have warned about the adverse consequences of overlooked language differences, exclusions and power imbalances (Gaibrois & Steyaert, 2017; Heikkilä & Smale, 2011), linked with individuals' command of language registers selected as the standard language.

The ways in which employees respond to language policies aimed at standardization of corporate language use are therefore seen as dependent on cultural and national contexts, and also as affected by departmental and organizational issues – including exposure to multiple linguistic registers and intra-national linguistic variations (Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Zander, Mockaitis, Harzing, et al, 2011). Specifically, the extent of acceptance or resistance with regard to corporate language standardization may depend on the degree to which individuals consider their career interests to be affected by their own level of proficiency in the corporate language (Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Lønsmann, 2017). Therefore, for reasons of self-interest and professional advancement, individuals whose skills in the corporate language are highly developed may be less likely to resist standardization compared to individuals whose skills in the language imposed through standardization are low (e.g. Piekkari et al., 2007; Vaara et al., 2005). Responses to standardization also reflect employees' perception of the HR function's effectiveness in enabling staff to develop the expected level of linguistic skills (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999). In addition, responses to language standardization can also be influenced by individuals' evaluations of whether the use of the corporate language makes sense within day-to-day departmental practice (Lønsmann, 2017). As Sanden and Lønsmann (2018) have demonstrated through a study of MNCs in Denmark and Sweden, front-line employees are likely to use their own discretionary powers to manoeuvre linguistically complex situations, departing from fixed corporate language policies with a view to respond to the demands of their job. Similarly, other authors have argued that employees may ignore or undermine corporate dictates aimed at language standardization in the organization (e.g. Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006; Marschan-Piekkari et al, 1999; Wilmot, 2017). IB scholars have also drawn attention to the socio-emotional influences associated with strong linguistic identities on employees' responses to language standardization (Bordia & Bordia, 2015). For example, in their analysis of the case of Siemens in Finland, Fredriksson et

al (2006) noted the impact of linguistic identities on tensions between English and German. Furthermore, Zhang and Harzing (2016) observed how Chinese nationals considered it their right to speak their own home language in the absence of foreign (Nordic) expatriates.

Whilst the literature addressing responses to language standardization developed within language-sensitive IB research has generated valuable insights, to date, it has prioritized standardization studied with reference to the introduction of English as the corporate language, and to tensions between English and other languages (see also Sanden, 2020). On the other hand, sociolinguistic studies have also considered standardization with a focus on competing registers within national domains. Johnstone (2016), for instance, points to the development of new cosmopolitan identities and the revival of local languages through tourism, arguing that multiple influences continue to fuel tensions in response to language standardization with respect to different language systems and co-existing registers within national and linguistic community boundaries. However, neither language-sensitive IB research nor sociolinguistics have explored responses to language standardization with regard to a special language of professional practice and the context within which the special language use is embedded.

Following from the above, there is a need for language-sensitive IB research to develop greater understanding of professionals' responses to corporate language standardization, especially with reference to languages other than English and to special languages of professional practice. It is crucial to address how these responses may be shaped by both aspects of the broader socio-political context and by other considerations, such as those specific to the professional context and organization in which standardization takes place, as well as individual-level issues. Below, we focus on the professional context of journalism. We discuss the importance of professional values and language competencies for the use of the journalistic special language in the case of arabophone journalism, and explain the relevance of profession-related considerations to understanding journalists' responses to language standardization.

2.3. The impact of professional values and language competencies on journalists' practice

A central feature of special languages is specialist terminology, often considered to be easily translatable from one language to another (Tietze et al, 2016). With respect to journalism, the terminology and the practice components are closely interconnected, and reflected in the journalistic special language. As Cotter (2010) explains, the profession's 'special language' includes both technical aspects, such as visual and linguistic imagery, story organization, and argument building, and more value-laden elements based on journalistic professional values. The key values of accuracy, impartiality and fairness in journalistic output have been legitimized across multiple national contexts, along with language choices that facilitate the enactment of those values (Boudana, 2016; Hafez, 2002). Moreover, international journalists need to be able to represent their native culture to the rest of the world from a position of intellectual agency and specific cultural knowledge (Ramone, 2011). That needs to be done within the limits of their 'discursive responsibility' (Medina, 2006), rooted in the awareness of journalists' impact on society. Since language is constitutive not only of personal, but also organizational identities (Peltokorpi & Yamao, 2017), journalists' language also reflects the demands resulting from their employers' strategy (Pallas, Fredriksson & Wedlin, 2016).

A contextualized examination of journalists' responses to corporate efforts to standardize their language of practice requires closer insight into the special language of journalism. This includes paying attention to different varieties of language registers, and competing approaches to language choices, emerging from how a given language's symbolic, political and moral functions are interpreted (Nader, 2018). This is because in many countries – including Egypt, where the majority of the empirical material was collected – impartiality as a value competes with the belief in demanding government accountability through an often strong interventionist journalist style (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Mellado et al, 2011; Rao, 2008). Therefore, in the case of journalism, a potential source of resistance to special language standardization may lie in

whether and how it is seen to affect journalists' professional independence, authority, discursive responsibility and a focus on the public good.

Standard Arabic, the language of journalistic practice in our study, is only mastered by the educated elites (Bidaoui, 2017; Gherwash, 2017; Haeri, 2000). As mentioned earlier, it is not spoken by any language community, but rather used for reading, delivering speeches and engaging in intellectual conversations. The association of SA with the elite status of its speakers means that skills in SA, and more specifically the journalistic special language variant of SA, may also have implications for professional inclusion and individual career opportunities. Understanding the importance of competencies in SA in the context of arabophone journalism is relevant in light of the growing interest of language-sensitive IB research in individual- and organization-level perspectives on language competencies, their contextual embeddedness, and their impact on professional practice (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Barner-Rasmussen et al, 2014; Chen & Chang, 2010). As Barner-Rasmussen et al (2014) point out, understandings of 'language skills' need to be qualified with application to different registers and dimensions, such as the language of specific geographic areas, *linguae francae*, corporate languages, corporate sociolects, and special languages. The example of journalism illustrates this particularly well. For instance, within the BBC, the expected level of language skills used in journalistic production should not only manifest in delivering factually accurate output, but also in certain aesthetic qualities of syntax, style and oral characteristics that all contribute towards perceptions of familiarity and authority (Baumann, Gillespie & Sreberny, 2011a).

Professionals' 'metacognitive competencies' (Haukås, 2018; Rehg, Gundlach & Grigorian, 2012), or higher level skills enabling them to form an understanding of what skills are needed to master a task, could potentially present another profession-related influence upon responses to standardization. In journalism, an important metacognitive competency is that of appreciating the significance of translation, not least because of translators' ability to mediate

between the interests of a range of stakeholders (Ciuk, James & Śliwa, 2019), sometimes within the constraints of centre-periphery relationships and hierarchies (Piekkari, Tietze & Koskinen, 2020). This ability becomes especially relevant for journalistic practice, as journalists play a key role in mediating the production of various versions of news for differing audiences, and in diverse institutional and geopolitical contexts (Baumann, Gillespie & Sreberny, 2011b). Interlingual translation emerges as a politically-informed act of broader cultural translation, rather than a value-neutral, purely technical linguistic task (Baumann et al, 2011a; Ciuk et al, 2019; Wilmot, 2017). As Tawfiq and Ghani (2015) have shown, during the Arab Spring, different media corporations used translation strategies which reflected their own aims, perspectives and target audiences. Including the role of translation amidst the processes of corporate language standardization is therefore important in the context of this study.

The discussion so far has highlighted the following ‘gaps’ in language-sensitive IB research: 1) the need for a contextualized study of both specific multilingual contexts and organizational linguascapes, in particular within non-anglophone settings; 2) the need for greater understanding of responses to language standardization, especially in relation to standardization of a special language. The motivation behind this paper is to address these lacunae in knowledge, through understanding and learning about responses to corporate standardization of the special language of journalism in the arabophone context. In the next section, we discuss the research context, before proceeding to explain the rationale behind the research, the data collection and the analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1 The research context

The BBC Arabic Service – part of the BBC World Service (WS) – has headquarters in London as well as offices and stringers (free-lancers) in different Arabic speaking countries, serving a global audience of more than 250 million people. The Cairo Bureau is the largest one

outside London. Whilst all journalists working for WS are able to communicate in English, Arabic is the language of interactions in local bureaus and most journalistic output, with daily editorial meetings held by senior BBC Arabic Services' editors in the London office.

The BBC Academy delivers training, including induction (delivered in English), addressing the BBC's editorial values of independence, transparency, impartiality, responsibility and accuracy, and the importance of the use of appropriate journalistic language for delivering output that adheres to these values. As the majority of the WS's output is produced in the local languages, the BBC Academy has also introduced language-specific websites – BBC Academy Languages. These provide support materials requested by each language hub, along with more generic content reinforcing the BBC's editorial values, translated from English. At the time of the data collection, there was a drive to establish a BBC Arabic 'house style'. BBC language-specific 'house styles' set standards related to grammar, spelling and the use of capitalization and acronyms. They also contain specialized glossaries, containing vocabulary deemed fair, unbiased and reflective of the corporation's editorial values. For languages with different scripts, 'house styles' include standardized modes of transcription. The organizational attempt at introducing a BBC Arabic 'house style' provided a unique opportunity to examine language standardization of a special language.

3.2 Data sources

The core empirical material consists of 29 face-to-face interviews with 27 BBC professionals, with two participants interviewed twice. This includes five participants interviewed at an early stage, whose views were helpful in building an understanding of the organizational context, but not included in the final analysis (and not listed in Table 1). In total, 24 interviews with 22 people were drawn on in the analysis of the professionals' responses to language standardization. Participants' names have been anonymized, and their details kept to a level that would not infringe on their anonymity. Table 1, which provides details of the study sample,

contains limited descriptions of participants' roles, and only differentiates among journalists by level of experience – 'journalist' or 'senior journalist'. Participating journalists were mostly studio-based and had between two and seven years of work experience with the BBC, typically with prior or parallel experience with Egyptian agencies. 'Senior' journalists had more than seven years' experience and most had leadership roles. 16 of the participants were Egyptian. This reflects the composition of the BBC Arabic Service's bureau, with other nationalities described as non-Egyptian (within the Arabic bureau), or non-Arabic (working in other departments), for the sake of anonymity. The interviews typically lasted over one hour, with the three longest ones lasting two hours each.

- Insert Table 1 here -

In addition to conducting the interviews, the field researcher shadowed Ameera, the editor of the BBC Academy Languages websites, once to twice a week over seven months, participated in weekly meetings of the BBC Academy, attended training on ethics in the use of visual materials and a workshop for London-based Arabic hub professionals. This resulted in a rich set of fieldnotes documenting observations made *in situ* and informal conversations.

3.3 Data collection

The interview schedule was developed following a review of relevant literature. The semi-structured interviews addressed five areas: 1) participants' professional background; 2) day-to-day roles and practices; 3) needs and preferences relating to training (addressing this area was a condition of securing access); 4) views about, and challenges associated with, the BBC's editorial values; and 5) standardization of the BBC 'house style' of Arabic.

Participants were given the scope to define and frame experienced organizational phenomena and to shape the conversation (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). This allowed for clarification of meanings, and for a partial counterbalancing of the risks involved in conducting the interviews in English, which was neither the interviewer's nor participants' first language,

despite fluency at a professional level. Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004) highlight that connections between the interviewer and participant may be weakened due to the lack of a common language as a point of connection, and that the use of a language in which the participant exhibits a lower level of competence than the interviewer can give rise to power differentials in the interview context. To avoid projecting linguistic and intellectual superiority, the field researcher began each interview by pointing out that English was not her mother tongue, and positioned herself as someone *learning* about the participants' journalistic craft. She also found that a shared position as a 'non-European' was useful in creating rapport.

Importantly, the field researcher had a wider language-related professional expertise, which not only legitimized her role as an interviewer, but also informed the analysis process. The interviewer was familiar, at different levels, with the following languages: fluent in English and her first language – Portuguese, comfortable in communication in Spanish, and formally introduced to Latin, French, Italian, and German, as well as Farsi in its spoken language and written script components. A linguist at an undergraduate level, she had been exposed to the theory and practice of linguistics, interlingual translation and pedagogy in language teaching. This profile was also instrumental in justifying her role as a researcher and participant observer when conducting fieldwork in London. For example, Ameera would invariably refer to those language competencies when introducing the researcher to members of the BBC Academy and BBC Arabic Service. The researcher's meta-cognitive competencies (Rehg et al, 2012) in boundary crossing from Latin and Anglo-Germanic based languages to Farsi became particularly relevant for how she was perceived and for her ability to develop a context-specific analysis with respect to languages.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis followed an abductive approach, as is common practice in the exploration of case studies (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Salmi, 2011). This involved combining a theoretically

motivated focus of research – with an emphasis on linguascapes and responses to language standardization – with concepts and priorities which emerged during the interviews. The first round of the analysis applied an interpretive, tailor-made tool based on cognitive mapping techniques (Hodgkinson, Sund & Galavan, 2018; Swan, 1997). The cognitive mapping technique uses map-like diagrams or devices to display representations of someone’s thinking at a given time. The tool enhanced the interpretive analysis through the early identification of influences located at different analytical levels – macro-, meso- and micro-, and helped us in adding nuance to the understanding of linguascapes.

With a view to examine in-depth relevant aspects of influence, each individual script was used to produce an individual map of statements and concepts relevant to the research question. The process involved re-reading interview scripts and re-listening to recordings, identifying pertinent sentences, and reproducing them word-for-word or very closely paraphrased. Central themes were initially identified, which, in turn, led to the recursive adaptation of the literature review. Each vignette was written in a box format, and arranged on a sheet (map), in theme zones containing related boxes/vignettes. Emerging meanings and themes were then refined further, reflecting the content of the collected vignettes. The following phase involved the generation of combined maps to identify regularities with regard to commonly held views. To ensure a comprehensive and nuanced analysis, outlying ideas were also included and flagged out. A detailed description of the reiterative process used, albeit with reference to a different research project, can be found in Author (XXXX).

Once the non-linear and reiterative process of comparing and contrasting theoretical concepts and empirical findings reached a point where a more systematic combination of concepts was concluded (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), two more visually understandable tables were produced (Tables 2 and 3), reflecting an approach akin to that used by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012). However, in line with comments by Welch, Mees-Buss and Piekkari (2019),

it must be stressed that while the Gioia methodology purports the use of a strictly inductive approach, we used an abductive approach. In practice, the 1st order concepts, 2nd order themes and aggregate themes represented within Tables 2 and 3 were arrived at through an abductive rationale, whereby emerging concepts were combined recursively with ideas derived from the academic literature. Each table contains at least three illustrative quotes for each 1st order concept identified, including mostly commonly held views, but also examples of outlying quotes, which are pinpointed in the discussion.

4. Journalists' responses to corporate standardization of the journalistic special language

The motivation behind this paper was to address responses to corporate language standardization with regard to the special language of journalism in the arabophone context. The findings highlight that these responses were influenced by a range of issues occurring at different levels: from macro-environmental and professional-level influences external to the BBC, to meso-level organizational issues and micro-level individual journalists' career considerations. The empirical analysis is structured along two aggregate themes: 1) external influences on journalists' responses to language standardization; and 2) organizational- and individual-level influences on journalists' responses to language standardization.

4.1. External influences on journalists' responses to language standardization

In contrast to previous studies addressing employees' reactions to top-down language strategy decisions (Decock et al, 2018; Hinds, Neeley & Cramton, 2014; Marschan et al, 1997), our findings demonstrate that language standardization in the case of the introduction of a BBC 'house style' of SA was, to a large extent, actively embraced by staff. The journalists' views were underpinned by macro-level influences on language standardization, including the socio-political and cultural complexities of the broader arabophone context, and the existence of multiple language registers across the arabophone countries and diasporic communities. Table 2 illustrates the external influences on participants' responses to language

standardization, providing evidence in relation to the first part of our research question.

– Insert Table 2 here –

When explaining their support for the language standardization initiative, the journalists commonly emphasized the need to deal with multiple dialects, and therefore address intra-language differentiation within the arabophone context (Albirini, 2016). In this regard, they stressed the special role of SA in pan-Arabic communication. They generally believed it to be a country-neutral lingua franca (Hafez, 2002; Versteegh, 2001), supportive of communication across arabophone linguistic communities. There was a consensus among the participants that SA was required to counter the negative effects of intra-language differentiation and potential hindrances to the clarity of cross-country communication:

There are many different dialects of Arabic, so uniting all countries in a way that they can all understand is a positive thing. (Djamila)

The existence of a variety of registers was seen to influence not only cross-community communication, but also journalistic practice in Arabic in its various modes. To individual journalists, SA also provided a way of protecting them from being faced with historically- and politically-grounded sources of conflict and competition among colloquial registers dominant in different Arabic countries (Ashcroft, 2001). The use of SA allowed them to avoid potential stereotyping and professional exclusion, making sure that the audience ‘*can’t know what country you come from*’ (Salah). In contrast to other studies, where participants raised concerns about the consequences of language standardization for their status inside the organization (Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze, 2014; Decock et al, 2018; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014), our participants paid more attention to how they were judged by an Arabic speaking audience. They wished to come across as competent users of SA, which, as previously explained, is only mastered by the educated elites (Albirini, 2016; Gherwash, 2017; Haeri, 2000).

Competent language use, in general, was symbolic of *high quality journalism* (Hamid).

When talking about their practice, the journalists mentioned the existence of Arabic dialects, Standard Arabic as lingua franca, and, crucially, the importance of SA and the development of a house style. For them, appropriate language use needed to reflect the professional values of journalism (Deuze, 2005; Medina, 2006), such as *'fairness and impartiality'* in reporting (Djamila), *'reliability'* (Magda) and *'credibility'* (Hamid) of output.

Moreover, having a house style was often mentioned as a core practice of good quality media corporations. Since they considered language as *'the whole fabric of journalism'* (Ameera), the journalists referred to the introduction of a 'house style' language as a well-established practice in their sector, and the appropriate approach to supporting good quality professional practice. Following from that, it also became evident that competence in using journalistic language was closely linked with participants' self-identification with the BBC's organizational identity (Peltokorpi & Yamao, 2017). In the following sub-section, we discuss the organizational- (meso-) as well as individual- (micro-) level influences on the journalists' responses to language standardization.

4.2. Organizational- and individual-level influences on journalists' responses to language standardization

Within the second aggregate theme, we identified three different and interlinked sets of issues, relating to the organizational- (meso-) and individual- (micro-) levels of influence on participants' responses to language standardization: 1) tensions associated with the use of Standard Arabic within the BBC; 2) the importance of competence in SA for journalists' professional mastery; 3) translation skills as a key competency of journalists. We discuss these three sets of issues in the sub-sections below. Table 3 illustrates the organizational- (meso-) and individual- (micro-) level influences on journalists' responses to language standardization and directly refers to the second and third part of the research question.

- Insert Table 3 here -

4.2.1 Tensions associated with the use of Standard Arabic within the BBC

As previously explained, participants' positive responses to the introduction of a BBC 'house style' of SA were, among other things, associated with seeing language standardization as a vehicle for enacting the professional values of journalism which, in turn, they considered the BBC to represent. Journalists saw a 'house style' as key to maintaining the '*value of [the BBC's] brand*' (Magda).

At the same time, using language in a way that adhered to the BBC's editorial values and upheld the organizational brand was also marred by tensions, which impacted the evolving BBC Arabic Service's linguascape. These tensions stemmed from situations where language choices were made centrally in London, without consulting journalists based in Cairo. While decisions reflected the BBC's editorial values, they sometimes stood in conflict with participants' desire to exercise authority and control over the application of their special language. Participants criticized the requirement to rely on vocabulary decisions made by editors in the London-based BBC Arabic headquarters, rather than on their own professional judgement about how to report the news:

It was only when people started burning the palace and the police withdrew from the streets that we could call it a 'revolution', as opposed to 'uprising'. Oh, come on, it was always a revolution. Of course it was. (Amal)

The above quote demonstrates that in reporting the events of the Arab Spring, journalists were not just being asked to abide by sanctioned and neutral vocabulary, but by top-down decisions regarding evolving categorizations and representations of the events (Ashcroft, 2001). Other examples of language-related decisions, such as choosing to use '*killed*' versus '*murdered*', '*freedom fighter*' or '*rebel*'; or '*ex-president*' versus '*ousted president*', also illustrate which words the journalists were told to use as situations changed. This was seen as problematic, especially where vocabulary choices were considered as ethically and politically charged, or

where correspondence of meanings is difficult to establish. As one participant explains:

What word should we use for ‘rebels’? - (متمرد) / mutamarrid/or (الثوار) /al-thuwwar/?

So, the senior editors met in London and decided to use (قوات أُل مجلس أُل وطني) / Kawat Al Majles Al Watany/, which in English is a party called National Assembly Forces – now, that is not Arabic, it’s from English. (Fatemah)

Fatemah’s comment points to semantic mismatches between English and Arabic, and highlights the meaning and representation implications resulting from an ethnocentric stance to managing languages within specific linguascapes (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Janssens & Steyaert, 2014; Logemann & Piekkari, 2015). The term /mutamarrid/ refers to a person who rejects a superior’s order. Its connotations are pejorative, akin to a ‘criminal’ in the Western context. On the other hand, the term /al-thuwwar/ has a root in the notion of ‘revenge’ and would originally have been translated as ‘the avengers’, though more recently it has been used within the context of revolt and revolution. The word /thuwwar/ became increasingly used with reference to those who rebel within their right, with the opposite connotation to that of ‘terrorists’ or ‘criminals’, or indeed, /mutamarrid/. The senior editors’ solution, in this case, was to resort to a neologism (*National Assembly Forces*) and its translation (*Kawat Al Majles Al Watany*). Whilst this attempt at controlling meaning (Ciuk et al, 2019; Logemann & Piekkari, 2015) aimed at avoiding judgmental reporting through the use of a purely descriptive term, this vocabulary choice was seen by Fatemah as alien. This example illustrates how in those instances where journalists were critical of language standardization, their criticisms did not refer to standardization *per se*, but to its top-down imposition. They felt that their professional mastery of SA should be trusted and that they should be involved in decision-making concerning the representation of events (see also Bermann, 2005).

Individuals’ personal ethics and politics also played a role in generating a further source of tension. They explained that when engaging in political reporting, especially during

events as politically and personally significant as the Arab Spring, following the BBC ‘house style’ with its ‘impartial’ language posed challenges to individuals, since ‘*it’s not always easy to put in practice the idea of providing a balanced view*’ (Ali). Whilst supporting the notion of using unbiased vocabulary, participants felt strongly about representing reality as they saw it on their own terms (Medina, 2006). Nevertheless, they still resisted the impulse to engage in an interventionist style of journalism (Hanitzsch et al, 2011; Rao, 2008).

In addition to issues of control and personal politics, yet another emerging source of tension was associated with a clear discrepancy between expected and actual standards of SA competence – which journalists considered to have direct implications for the BBC’s brand reputation. On the one hand, they embraced language competence as an aspect of their self-identification with the BBC’s organizational identity and brand (see Peltokorpi & Yamao, 2017), as illustrated by Fatemah’s point that ‘*when you are on screen you have to be the brand*’, and therefore ‘*the best [you] can*’. Being associated with the corporation’s values, target audience and brand image held importance for the participants with respect to their career considerations within arabophone journalism. On the other hand, they showed awareness that not all BBC Arabic Service’s journalists had the expected level of competence in SA and that, in fact, there were instances of journalists using ‘*the sort of language that would make our type of audience cringe*’ (Magda). The articulated tensions, again, did not refer to language standardization *per se*, but to limited access to language learning and development opportunities (Bordia & Bordia, 2015). At the same time, participants emphasized that competence in Standard Arabic was integral to journalists’ professional mastery – a theme we discuss next.

4.2.2 Competence in Standard Arabic as integral to journalists’ professional mastery

Participants’ responses also revealed that they considered competence in Standard Arabic as integral to the professional mastery (Larson, 1977) of journalists. Intrinsic to that was a

connection between their own professional proficiency and status, and therefore career progression, and journalistic language standardization. Language-sensitive IB literature has primarily discussed the issue of individuals' status within the organization following the introduction of a corporate language, highlighting differences in language competence between own (local) languages and corporate languages (Peltokorpi & Yamao, 2017; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). In this study, competence in the official corporate language of the BBC, English, did not have a prominent place in participants' accounts, although they viewed it as a condition of obtaining more generic training provided by the BBC Academy. Instead, the arabophone journalists stressed the primacy of their own register of practice, Standard Arabic, for their organizational success. They highlighted that it is '*important*' for their career to have '*a very good Arabic*' (Salah), and emphasized the effort required for that, as, compared to English, '*it takes much more effort and study to use the [journalistic] Arabic correctly*' (Djamila). In these circumstances, the journalists viewed the introduction of a BBC 'house style' of SA as a promising opportunity to develop their competence in the special language of journalism.

Due to the fragmentation of Arabic and the special position of SA within Arabic linguascapes, participants considered the BBC's corporate language standardization efforts as a means of signalling to their audience the organization's commitment to being '*a good source of information*', and in doing so, appealing to the '*educated elites*' (Djamila) as their target audience. They shared the view that a 'house style' ensured commonalities in journalistic practice, stressing that proficiency in SA contributed towards their professional status within the broader context of arabophone journalism. At the same time, they raised the centrality of training and development opportunities. Advancing their skills and professional status depended on their employer's commitment to the provision of resources towards developing multiple and inter-related types of professional competency, such as language use when

engaging with different types of delivery platform. As one participant pointed out, *'no journalist is the same. There are so many roles and everyone is strong at a different one'*, and therefore, the BBC Arabic staff *'need different types of help'* (Amal). They referred to the BBC as a *'school'* (Amal) that provided on-the-job opportunities for the development of *'proficiency'* (Leyla) necessary for career progression.

Nevertheless, they also criticized the organization's deficiencies in the provision of a more context-specific approach to development. They commented on the need for training to be delivered in Arabic, also conveying the idea that development of SA competency required in-depth understanding of multiple sociocultural contexts. They also raised more general issues relating to delivery platforms and associated journalistic techniques. Participants commonly stated that they needed a context-specific approach to staff development. This, in their view, required the headquarters' recognition of the inherent differences between practising journalism in English and in Arabic. Being able to practise journalism proficiently involved not only having highly developed linguistic skills in SA, but also a degree of specific cultural knowledge (Barner-Rasmussen et al, 2014; Ramone, 2011), associated with each of the locations composing the highly segmented arabophone context of their practice:

Being trained in Arabic by people from different countries is different because you learn about their experience within their backgrounds, and we are reporting to very different audiences. (Salah)

Beyond this, however, switching between journalistic outputs in English and in Arabic emerged as another type of demand on their day-to-day professional practice. Specifically, translation came across as a further key competency associated with practising journalism within the BBC Arabic Service – a theme we elaborate on below.

4.2.3 Translation skills as a key competency of journalists

Interlingual translation was an aspect of the standardization process towards which participants exhibited the most ambivalence. The ability to translate from English into Arabic was recognized as a key competency and a daily task of journalists working for the BBC Arabic Service, albeit one that, in the journalists' view, was not appropriately understood or resourced:

I keep having this discussion with a senior member of the Academy. Some people have this idealized notion that as a high quality news producer we make news from scratch, and that therefore we don't do translation, but in reality that is not fully true. Half of what the international desks do is to translate their sources on an ongoing basis – and none of us have actually been trained to do translation, which we have to do there and then, on a daily basis. That's a special skill that needs to be developed and needs resources for that. (Ameera)

The above excerpt – along with multiple references to translation as a key competency of journalists – reflects how individual understandings of, attitudes to, and metacognitive competencies in interlingual translation are necessarily shaped by the degree to which professionals have had exposure to translation as a core professional task, or even simply to the continuous crossing of linguistic boundaries. It provides further evidence that there is a substantive difference between the views of those not normally exposed to translation at work, and those professionals who are responsible for carrying intended meanings across languages (Piekkari et al, 2020). Furthermore, as highlighted by Piekkari et al (2020), the dynamics of power differentials within a specific context – and ultimately, control over the budget – reinforces the view that the challenges and opportunities for agency associated with interlingual translation are underpinned by both linguistic and organizational factors.

Participants also emphasized the role of interlingual translation skills as crucial both for speed and efficiency of their production, and their ability to '*uphold [BBC's] editorial values*'

(Amal). As discussed in language-sensitive IB literature (e.g. Ciuk et al, 2019; Piekkari et al, 2020; Steyaert & Janssens, 2012), without centrally supported and resourced structures for the development of translation skills, the significance and extent of interlingual translation is often unacknowledged and invisible in multinational organizations. In light of the lack of formal training in translation, standardization of their journalistic language was considered helpful in achieving speedy production of news and authoring breaking news, because when *'time pressure is a challenge'*, as is the case with news reporting, *'having ready-made glossaries and lists of terms with their spellings helps a lot when we are translating things'*. (Salah)

In summary, the journalists saw the BBC Academy's limited interest in developing their translation competencies as evidence of poor understanding of what practising journalism in a non-English context and language actually entails. This sense of organizational under-appreciation and under-investment in journalists' translations skills was, as discussed earlier, coupled with frustration about reduced power over translation due to centrally-made vocabulary choices. However, whilst top-down decision-making about vocabulary posed challenges to the professionals' ability to put into practice their own sense of fairness and accuracy in representation when communicating with politically divided audiences, the existence of *à priori* prepared glossaries with translated terms was also recognized by them as supportive of another aspect of practising professional journalism, namely, a speedy production of content that was free from spelling and grammatical errors.

5. Towards a context-sensitive understanding of special language standardization

This paper has addressed corporate language standardization with regard to the journalistic special language within the arabophone context. The analysis was guided by the following research question: In what ways, if at all, do external, organizational- and individual-level issues influence journalists' responses to corporate attempts at standardizing the journalistic special language?

In shedding light on the multiple and interdependent levels of influence on professionals' responses to special language standardization, our study contributes to both language-sensitive IB and sociolinguistics research. Firstly, the research enriches language-sensitive IB literature addressing responses to corporate language standardization (Gaibrois & Steyaert, 2017; Heikkilä & Smale, 2011; Linn, Sanden & Piekkari, 2018), in particular in the case of a special language (Tietze et al, 2016). It supports the contention that responses to standardization are embedded within cultural and national contexts (Zander et al, 2011), and that they are affected by a range of issues at the individual, organizational and national level (Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). However, in contrast to studies that have highlighted resistance and tensions in response to top-down language strategy decisions (Decock et al, 2018; Hinds et al, 2014; Marschan et al, 1997), especially by staff who are less fluent in the corporate language being imposed (e.g. Piekkari et al, 2007; Vaara et al, 2005), it offers insights into a situation where such decisions were, to a large extent, positively received and embraced by staff.

The study confirms other researchers' findings that responses to standardization are interlinked with individuals' assessment of whether proficiency in the corporate language is in their career interest, and whether using the corporate language makes sense in their daily work (Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Lønsmann, 2017). Unlike previous research findings, this study shows that professionals might value standardization of their special language of practice, seeing it as an opportunity to develop proficiency in it, and to increase their own professional status and career opportunities. Moreover, in contrast to work that has demonstrated that employees may ignore or undermine corporate initiatives aimed at language standardization (e.g. Fredriksson et al, 2006; Marschan-Piekkari et al, 1999; Wilmot, 2017), our findings show that, in the case of special language use that is crucial to corporate identity, and a prestigious brand which the employees identify with and wish to be associated with, top-down imposed language choices may be adhered to, even if in conflict with employees' personal ethics and politics.

Another finding which contrasts with earlier studies is that language standardization strategies need not necessarily lead to social exclusion or marginalization. This can partly be explained by the fact that although, within the sample, there were differences in the journalists' level of competence in Standard Arabic, all of them were able and willing to professionally function in SA, and, importantly, wished to continue to develop their SA skills and to achieve a mastery in the language. Given the availability of the BBC Academy International websites across the world, one further outcome of the BBC's house style development initiative has been the generation of opportunities for journalists who were less competent in SA, including both those working for the BBC and non-BBC journalists, as well as the wider public, to develop their SA competencies. It follows that this study also contributes to existing *sociolinguistic* literature on language standardization, where previous research has highlighted the possible adverse effects of standardization, drawing attention to the threats it poses to language diversity (Heller, 2010). By contrast, our findings suggest that when language diversity is seen as divisive and tension-inducing, a reduction in language diversity brought about by standardization might be considered as positive. In addition, whilst sociolinguistics scholars have cautioned that standardization might potentially lead to disrespect for employee rights and identity (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2008), our research demonstrates that employees might see the use of standardized language as protecting and enhancing their professional identities.

It is important to highlight that the strongest influences shaping participants' responses to the standardization of their special language of practice were found to be associated with the external environment. That includes the profession itself, encompassing institutionalised practices and values; and the very nature of Arabic, as a diglossic system shaped by diasporas, migrations, historically embedded linguistic variation and socio-political stances on language standardization. In addition, participants' self-identification with the BBC's organizational

identity and their brand can help explain further why, to a large extent, participants were supportive of the standardization. Critical views, where expressed, were voiced in situations where the journalists felt that their authority and autonomy as professionals was undermined by the standardization process. As such, this study confirms Bermann's (2005) contention that language standardization, in reducing employees' control over communication practices at work, can give rise to their resentment. At the same time, it contributes to knowledge about what influences employees' responses to language standardization in organizations. Extant research highlights the link between individuals' competence in the corporate language – for example, due to their nationality – and the acceptance as well as resistance towards standardization (e.g. Piekkari et al, 2007; Vaara et al, 2005). This study complements those findings by drawing attention to context-specific factors shaping responses to standardization, such as the professional values of journalism and the high regard and prestige associated with the BBC's brand.

In addition, through addressing a hitherto under-explored (arabophone) context (Tenzer et al, 2017), our research generates insights into this complex and internally highly differentiated language system, and contributes to the exploration of under-researched languages as *linguae francae* (Barner-Rasmussen et al, 2014; Sanden, 2020). Thanks to its focus on Arabic, the study points to the relevance of differentiation *within* specific natural language systems, thus enriching existing research which has primarily addressed tensions and competition *between* natural languages (Decock et al, 2018). As such, it brings to the fore a potentially overlooked aspect of language differences, and offers novel insights into our understanding of language-focused power dynamics.

The findings highlight the need for corporate plans for language standardization to take into account language competence development, based on a contextualized understanding of what the relevant language competencies entail. Our research contributes to discussions about

language competencies in IB through showing how language competence may relate to a range of profession-specific skills, the importance of which may not always be obvious to actors outside that context of practice (Piekkari et al, 2020; Steyaert & Janssens, 2012). Based on our study, these language competencies may include: the professionals' ability to speak the corporate lingua franca and to engage with other languages required for the conduct of the organization's business; proficiency in the professionals' special language of practice when this differs from the corporate language; and interlingual translation skills. Language development efforts in multinational and multilingual organizations need to be de-centralized away from an exclusive focus on the corporate language, towards a more comprehensive and strategically-oriented consideration of what language competencies are required and who needs them across the organization. As this research suggests, staff development efforts should also involve consideration of the inclusion of professionals in language standardization decisions.

The analysis also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the concept of linguascapes in language-sensitive IB research. Steyaert et al (2011) argue that an examination of linguascapes should acknowledge the role of individuals' perceptions, interpretations and modes of rationalization in justifying and making sense of their own conduct. They describe organizational linguascapes from a socio-political perspective, whereby personal language choices are mediated and justified by a variety of sense-making discourses. Building upon Steyaert et al's (2011) argumentation, and Dovchin's (2017) view of linguascapes as a context-dependent changing process, we propose including and making explicit within an analytical framework for the study of specific linguascapes the regularities and interdependencies emerging from a range of structural aspects identified at different levels of analysis. Our findings show how individuals interpret macro-phenomena, as well as professional and organizational values and expectations through the lens of their own personal ethics, politics and career considerations. In addition, the research points to the implications these

considerations have on professionals' responses to corporate language standardization. As such, the study provides insights into the complexities of differentiated context-sensitive analysis (Pudelko et al, 2015) of linguascapes, and contributes to the so far limited body of work focusing on the impact of structural constraints and socially-produced meanings associated with specific languages (Vaara et al, 2005; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). We call for following a similar analytical logic in future studies of linguascapes. To develop a comprehensive and granular understanding of specific contexts, individuals' views and actions with regard to language use should be addressed with an acknowledgement of their interconnectedness with context-specific and historically embedded political, cultural and socio-economic conditions.

6. Conclusions

We conclude with suggestions for further research and with outlining the managerial implications emerging from our study.

6.1 Suggestions for further research

There is still much to be learned about the complexities of the use of languages in multinational and multilingual organizations, especially with respect to special language standardization (Tietze et al, 2016). As the majority of participants were Egyptian, considering a wider number of registers and language communities within the arabophone context could further contribute to a differentiated language-specific perspective in language-sensitive IB research. It would also add value to include the views of other journalists in the arabophone context, be it those only loosely associated with the BBC as stringers, or those not working for the BBC at all, with markedly different levels of competence in Standard Arabic. In addition, ongoing research into other professions and other languages may reveal unique challenges to special language standardization in multilingual organizations.

6.2 Managerial relevance

This study has several implications for managerial and professional practice. It is important for managers to be aware of the underlying, socio-political and cultural meanings, interpretations and views with respect to each language register that is relevant to professionals' work. Managers also need to understand how profession-specific values may affect the ways in which employees from different professional groups respond to corporate language strategies, such as language standardization. Further, language-related learning and development strategies should consider securing strategically relevant language and cultural competencies across the organization. This effort should include leaders' recognition of the value of professionals with specific cultural knowledge and metacognitive language competencies for devising productive language strategies, professional development approaches, and solutions sensitive to the target market. Finally, in the case of media organizations, decision-makers must be aware of potential adverse effects of the controversies and ethically-driven challenges resulting from corporate language and translation strategies.

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Table 1: Main study sample

Pseudonym	Participant's role	Location of interview	Further info
1. Julia	Trainer	London	Female Non-Arabic
2. Liz	Trainer	London	Female Non-Arabic
3. Gedminte	HR officer	London	Female Non-Arabic
4. Ameera	Academy International Website Editor	London (twice)	Female Non-Arabic
5. Asim	Senior journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
6. Mandisa	Senior journalist	London	Female Egyptian
7. Marwan	Senior journalist	London	Male Non-Egyptian
8. Hamid	Senior journalist	London (twice)	Male Non-Egyptian
9. Nadir	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
10. Fahim	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
11. Gamila	Senior journalist	Cairo	Female Egyptian
12. Leyla	Journalist	Cairo	Female Egyptian
13. Ali	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
14. Mohammad	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
15. Fatemah	Journalist	Cairo	Female Egyptian
16. Mustafa	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
17. Magdy	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
18. Amal	Journalist	Cairo	Female Egyptian
19. Magda	Journalist	Cairo	Female Egyptian
20. Djamila	Journalist	Cairo	Female Egyptian
21. Abed	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian

22. Salah	Journalist	Cairo	Male Egyptian
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Table 2 - Aggregate Theme (1): External influences on journalists' responses to language standardization		
Illustrative quotes	1st order concepts	2nd order themes
<p><i>There is often this underlying tension among Arabic speakers from different countries: whose Arabic is the best one. (field note)</i></p> <p><i>We work on a multi-platform basis – still radio in certain places, like Libya, but increasingly online and TV. For instance, our [Arabic] TV audience all over the world more than doubled in the last two years – we serve very different audiences – so, yes, strengthening their [SA] language skills is important, so we can reach across the world. (Marwan)</i></p> <p><i>When you speak Standard Arabic, nobody can judge you. (Salah)</i></p>	<p>Standard Arabic supports communication across arabophone linguistic communities</p>	<p>Standardization in response to linguistic register variety</p>
<p><i>There are different types of Arabic – we have the old classical Arabic, the classical modern Arabic (which is the language of the news), and so many dialects... We really need to support our journalistic language better, so that we can be flexible enough to use all these [journalistic] platforms. (Hamid)</i></p> <p><i>People like the idea of a house style because it avoids uncomfortable situations when deciding whose version [of Arabic] to use. (field note)</i></p> <p><i>You need [a house style] to make sure that all your journalists are using the same style of language and terms, and that becomes even more important when you have so much variation, as in Arabic. (Ali)</i></p>	<p>Standardized language (SA, journalistic special language, and house style) supports journalistic practice in Arabic</p>	<p>Standardization in response to linguistic register variety</p>
<p><i>Ethical issues are often related to word choice. (Djamila)</i></p> <p><i>In BBC and Reuters they are real professionals – they know what to say and how to say it. (Ali)</i></p> <p><i>Other agencies have a one-sided and biased approach [as opposed to] fairness and impartiality. (Abed)</i></p>	<p>Language use reflects professional values of journalism</p>	<p>Language use as symbolic of high quality journalism</p>

<p><i>All good quality media organizations have a house style. (Ali)</i></p> <p><i>In the BBC we have guidelines, a clear vision, a house style to follow. (Salah)</i></p> <p><i>Language is not always used as it should, but [to ensure quality] we need to standardize it and constantly update it. (Hamid)</i></p>	<p>A house style standard conveys high quality of journalistic production</p>	<p>Language use as symbolic of high quality journalism</p>
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<p>Table 3 - Aggregate Theme (2): Organizational and individual-level influences on journalists' responses to language standardization</p>		
<p>Illustrative quotes</p>	<p>1st order concepts</p>	<p>2nd order themes</p>
<p><i>It's not us choosing what words to use – and that is a big problem for us. We must use the words that our editors decide. I don't mind them doing that – London is the headquarters, but we're co-producers for London, we work together. So it is our right to be part of that daily meeting. (Fatemah)</i></p> <p><i>Why is it their decision? Are they more experienced? It's because they're the headquarters, that's why. They are the source of finance. (Nadir)</i></p> <p><i>[London HQs] send us an email, and tell us which words to use (...) I guess they [make vocabulary decisions] because they are the headquarters, and they decide on how to organise all the teams, and coordinate activities... Teams in London and in Cairo normally work together in projects, so, it's not that they have more experience - they are the headquarters, that's all. (Djamila)</i></p>	<p>Tensions over authority and control</p>	<p>Tensions associated with the use of Standard Arabic within the BBC</p>
<p><i>At the time the challenge was being neutral [but] I can't be just a journalist – I can't forget that I'm Egyptian. (Amal)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes it's really difficult to use balanced or neutral language, when you really want to say something else. For instance, as an Egyptian, I'm against Mubarak, but I can't let that come out in how I discuss things on the radio. I feel sick to my stomach. (Leyla)</i></p> <p><i>Many people have their personal blogs, where they show their point of view... Even if you use an alias, people might work it out: you can't have a view, you're the face of the BBC. Once you put your own view out there, how can you be respected as a journalist? (Ameera)</i></p>	<p>Tensions between BBC values and personal ethics and politics</p>	<p>Tensions associated with the use of Standard Arabic within the BBC</p>

<p><i>We are the BBC – one of the conditions to be here is to manage our own language... If people cannot speak Standard Arabic well, they shouldn't be here. (Gamila)</i></p> <p><i>If we don't [use the Arabic correctly], it will only hurt the BBC's credibility towards their target audience. (Djamila)</i></p> <p><i>Since the budget started to be cut with respect to rewards and training – and the turnover of staff started to increase noticeably – there was a clear increase in language mistakes being made on radio and more recently on TV. (Magda)</i></p>	<p>Tension between actual and expected standards of SA competence (in the context of the BBC brand)</p>	<p>Tensions associated with the use of Standard Arabic within the BBC</p>
<p><i>How to write, present and interview in Arabic is different to how it's done in English... We write in Arabic and present in Arabic, so we need to be trained in Arabic. (Leyla)</i></p> <p><i>I still feel that my level of Arabic needs to improve a lot before I can report from the streets, and become less reliant on pre-scripted in-house programmes. But, I really want to get to be a reporter. (Djamila)</i></p> <p><i>The Arabic we use to report is different to everyday Arabic – it's more like classical Arabic, it's not actually used by anyone on a regular basis. And that is extremely difficult- so full of regulations... And, yes, our audience is educated – if they listen to someone who is speaking more like their everyday Arabic and making mistakes in the formal language, why would they trust the BBC? (Magda)</i></p>	<p>Need for proficiency in Standard Arabic for journalistic practice</p>	<p>Competence in Standard Arabic as integral to journalists' professional mastery</p>
<p><i>The most famous thing about the BBC is very high level training. (...) But I've been here for two years and had very little training. (Amal)</i></p> <p><i>There are also new trends in online journalism, which we need to learn about. (Nadir)</i></p> <p><i>Online journalism is so different from radio. Little grammar mistakes escape in radio, but in online, you have to be able to check that very quickly, because it's written. But, the approach, say to headlines, is different. Because of search engines, you have to bear that in mind, and put the two together, what looks and sound right, and is searchable. How do you do that? You can train for that, but it's hard. (Marwan)</i></p>	<p>Need for training and development in multiple, interrelated types of professional competency</p>	<p>Competence in Standard Arabic as integral to journalists' professional mastery</p>
<p><i>We shouldn't be training people on BBC journalism, we should be training them on, say, impartial Swahili – not</i></p>	<p>Need for a context-</p>	<p>Competence in Standard</p>

<p><i>an abstract notion of language. Those skills need to be tailored to the needs of each group and each language. (Ameera)</i></p> <p><i>Opportunities to be trained outside Cairo would be important, because, it's not just about learning specific techniques – it's about learning about other journalists' mentality, how they create different angles, for instance. (Magdy)</i></p> <p><i>Training [is needed] on the countries where you are working or broadcasting to. People need to know more about cultural things, the best side, the worst side of people, how do we deal with people, not just interest rates. Well, I think that people should have some time to learn about all these countries we deal with. (Nadir)</i></p> <p><i>Training in Arabic is more relevant for our work. Our audience speaks Arabic, so we should be trained by Arabic speaking trainers – not necessarily Egyptians.. (Salah)</i></p>	<p>specific approach to development</p>	<p>Arabic as integral to journalists' professional mastery</p>
<p><i>You also need to be able to translate news from BBC sources in English. (Salah)</i></p> <p><i>Not everyone that works here was trained as a journalist to start with. A lot of journalists studied languages or even translation first, and I am sure I got this job because of my English, because there is so much translation involved in the job. (Amal)</i></p> <p><i>My main tasks are to translate, edit, write reports and news stories, and to present and participate in live coverage for breaking news. (Leyla)</i></p>	<p>Translation as a core journalistic skill</p>	<p>Translation skills as a key competency of journalists</p>
<p><i>We need a person allocated to [translating, checking spelling and pronunciation] to collect the views from the ground, and respond quickly to evolving world events. (Hamid)</i></p> <p><i>When it was close to Mubarak being ousted they had a meeting and decided to call it revolution. But, using an English word as the basis – such as 'revolution' or 'rebels' – and then trying to find the equivalent in Arabic is not so clear. You may not get the same meaning. That word exists in English, but maybe not Arabic. (Fatemah)</i></p> <p><i>A lot of the stuff is translated from English, and sometimes it's a problem of 'lost in translation'. Recently, there were dozens of inconsistencies, simply because of bad translation. (Abed)</i></p>	<p>Translation skills as necessary to ensure efficiency and fair representation.</p>	<p>Translation skills as a key competency of journalists</p>

